

VOICE IN THE COMMUNITY



PHOTOS BY VANESSA MONSIVIAS / EL PASO TIMES

Little Joe Hernandez shakes the hand of Guadalupe Villagrane during the launch of Salud Por Vida, a diabetes prevention program, on Thursday at La Fe's Cultural and Technology Center, 721 S. Ochoa.

Little Joe helps raise awareness of dangers of diabetes

By Aaron Bracamontes
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Four-time Grammy Award winner and Tejano recording artist Little Joe Hernandez shared his experience with diabetes and encouraged an auditorium full of people to not let the disease ruin their lives.

"We're just a little too proud to admit it, and that is a problem," Hernandez said Thursday. "We just have to change our ways of how we eat and how we live."

Hernandez and U.S. Rep. Silvestre Reyes, D-Texas, were at Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe's Cultural and Technology Center on Thursday to open the "Salud por Vida/Health for Life" campaign for diabetes self-management education.

The campaign, launched by TMF Health Quality Institute, aims to educate Hispanics about getting tested for diabetes and learning to live with it.

"Information is part of the answer," Hernandez said. "We have to inform the community."

Hernandez, of Little Joe y la Familia, is the campaign's

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Four-time Grammy Award winner and Tejano recording artist Little Joe Hernandez speaking about diabetes

spokesman and will appear in commercials around the border region starting Tuesday.

"Not only with his presence here and his message, but with his commercials starting to air, it is going to start raising awareness," Reyes said. "We (in El Paso) are 82 percent Hispanic and diabetes does affect us."

Through the program, TMF will partner with La Fe, Project



Silver Wolf presents Little Joe Hernandez a dancing prayer stick on behalf of the Texas Apache Nation during the Salud Por Vida launch Thursday at La Fe Cultural Center and Technology Center.

Vida and Centro San Vicente to provide free classes in El Paso. It will do the same in Bexar, Cameron, Hidalgo and Webb counties.

Lori Hooks, director of health disparities with TMF, said the program is funded by Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

"This is to empower people to take care of themselves," Hooks said. "We don't want people to wait until they have symptoms."

La Fe CEO Salvador Balcorta said this will further the efforts already in place to help educate diabetics.

"This is a chance for us to create projects around the border that are helpful," Balcorta said. "For us, any project that is going to serve the com-

munity is welcomed at La Fe."

Senaida Lara's husband discovered he had diabetes after heart surgery six years ago. She said this program is a positive step.

"With diabetes, you have to pay attention to what you eat," Lara said. "I always felt there should be a program to show people how to eat, even if they don't have the means."

Lillian Ruiz, who is diabetic, said it was reassuring to hear Hernandez talk about his own experience with the disease.

"Many people in this community don't even know they have diabetes," Ruiz said. "We should all support this program."

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